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University Relations/Enrollment Management

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## 2013 Parents as Partners\_Eduventures

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**PARENTS AS PARTNERS:**

*2013 PARENT MARKET UPDATE*



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report makes several key points:

- ▶ **Career preparation tops academics as key driver of college choice:** Like prospective students, parents are also focused on career preparation outcomes when evaluating schools and recognize the attributes employers are seeking.
- ▶ **Parents conduct their own research on colleges:** And they share those insights with their child.
- ▶ **Financial expectations and the reality of how families pay for college are not in sync:** Parents and their children are overestimating the amount of grants and scholarships that will be offered to them.
- ▶ **Parents are an underutilized partner in recruiting prospective students:** Most institutions don't have a highly sophisticated approach to targeting parents, which is a lost opportunity for schools in a competitive environment.





## INTRODUCTION

Second only to the prospective students themselves, parents are the most important demographic that schools should target when recruiting for their undergraduate programs. It is clear from our research on high school students preparing to attend college that their parents play an increasing and critical role in the college choice process. Eduventures' *2013 Parent Market Update* provides insight into this key partnership, including the influence, motivations, and perceptions of parents as their children engage in the college search process. In the fall of 2012, we conducted an online survey of over 1,300 parents whose sons and daughters were engaged in the college search process. *Parents as Partners: 2013 Parent Market Update* presents key findings on the behaviors of parents as they help influence and shape the college search process for their child.

Successfully recruiting students, both in terms of numbers as well as the desired student profile and capabilities, is essential for the continued success of colleges and universities across the country. A strong entering class lays a solid foundation for the institution, providing not only short-term revenue, but also a lifelong relationship with alumni and friends to the school. Parents are not only influencers in college choice but provide financial support through tuition and future gifts. The tools provided through the *2013 Parent Market Update* give you the insight needed to differentiate your institution from the competition and create your best class. This report is divided into four main sections:

- ▶ **Section 1:** Parents of the College Bound Market
- ▶ **Section 2:** What Parents Want: Key Factors Behind College Choice
- ▶ **Section 3:** Communication Channels: How to Talk to Mom and Dad
- ▶ **Section 4:** Parents' Perceptions on Finances and Cost

## ACCOMPANYING DATA

The Eduventures *2013 College Bound Market Update* and complementary online interactive data tool, both of which are available to all Enrollment Management Knowledge Community subscribers, are designed to accompany the *Parents as Partners* report. The *2013 College Bound Market Update* is the third annual survey of over 11,000 high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors and provides insight into the changing motivations and perceptions of this population as they engage in the college search process. The accompanying online interactive data tool allows viewers to examine survey responses by selecting from a broad range of demographic criteria such as age, gender, skill level, major of interest, school location, and more. To access this tool, please visit the Eduventures Research Library on our website.



## SECTION 1 – PARENTS OF THE COLLEGE BOUND MARKET

### WHO THEY ARE

Discussions of how to target the college bound market need to integrate the perceptions and drivers of who their parents are, in terms of not only their demographics, but also their goals for their child's educational career. Parents are more than just a financial investor in their child's future; they also play a key role in shaping the choices made by the prospective students. As a result, understanding parents' motivations and desired outcomes in relation to college choice is a necessary first step in creating distinct messages that resonate with this important audience. If you haven't yet developed a distinct communication plan for parents or are looking to refine your current plan, this report will direct you on who parents are and what is important to them.

### DIRECTORS – 50/50 PARTNERS – OBSERVERS

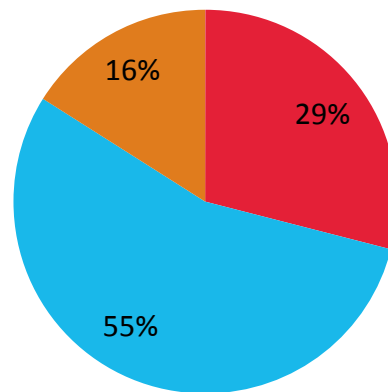
Parents fall into three distinct categories that are defined by their actions and behavior during their child's college search:

- ▶ **DIRECTORS** – Directors are those parents who describe themselves as leading the college search process. Making up 16% of the parents of prospective students, *Directors* are more likely to be from high-income families and are primarily comprised of mothers whose children, predominately sons, have lower test scores than their counterparts. A greater proportion of these parent types than others have achieved a graduate or professional degree.
- ▶ **50/50 PARTNERS** – Parents who are partners with their child in the college search process make up a majority. 55% of moms and dads in our survey report that they share the work of researching and selecting colleges to apply to with their child. Parents who are *50/50 Partners* tend to be most aligned with their child's preferences for a college major, indicating that both parent and child have played a part in influencing this decision.
- ▶ **OBSERVERS** – *Observers*, which comprise 29% of parents in our sample, play a small to moderate role in the college search process for their child. This group of parents has a larger proportion of lower-income households as compared to the other two groups. The only significant difference in the level of education for *Observers* is that parents in this group are less likely to have earned a graduate or professional degree. A higher proportion of the children of *Observers* score in the highest bands of standardized tests.



Figure 1. Distribution of Parent Types

■ Observers ■ 50/50 Partners ■ Directors



## PRAGMATISTS – INTELLECTUALS – SELF-ACTUALIZERS

Given the impact that parents have on the college search process, it is surprising that many schools have not thought more strategically about how to differentiate parents, often painting them with the same brush in terms of presumed motivations and attributes. The problem with this approach is that simply identifying someone as a parent of a prospective student and assuming homogeneity does not account for the differences in parents' goals for their children's education. While there are many similarities in behavior across those parents whose children are on the path to college, our data shows that parents have specific goals in regards to the overall educational experience, and that these goals correspond closely with the prospective students' own motivations. While parents recognize that there are many types of benefits to a college education, our research shows that parents are strongly motivated by one of three types of outcomes: career preparation, intellectual development, and personal growth. As a result, this report references three specific types of parents.

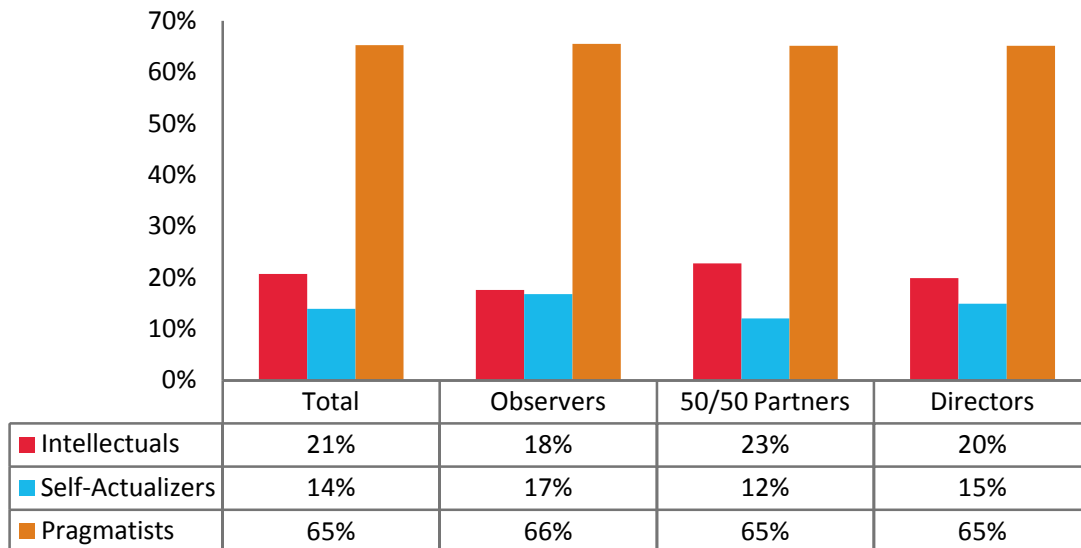
- ▶ **PRAGMATISTS** – *Pragmatists* are primarily motivated by the expectation that college will ultimately help prepare their children for a career. Making up the largest percentage of parents of prospective students, this group has a stronger interest in their child pursuing majors such as those in the health professions, science, technology, engineering, and business, all of which have the greatest potential for leading to a well-paying career in a high-demand area.
- ▶ **INTELLECTUALS** – Parents who believe that the primary purpose of college is to increase their children's knowledge and help them grow intellectually are identified as



*Intellectuals.* While still strongly interested in rigorous majors, such as those found in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics) disciplines, they also have a strong interest in the humanities.

- **SELF-ACTUALIZERS** - The smallest group of parents, *Self-Actualizers* see college as helping their children achieve the highest goals in terms of personal maturity and contributions to society. They also have the strongest preference for their children's pursuing of degrees in education, the arts, humanities and social sciences.

**Figure 2. Most Important Desired Outcomes for Child's Degree**



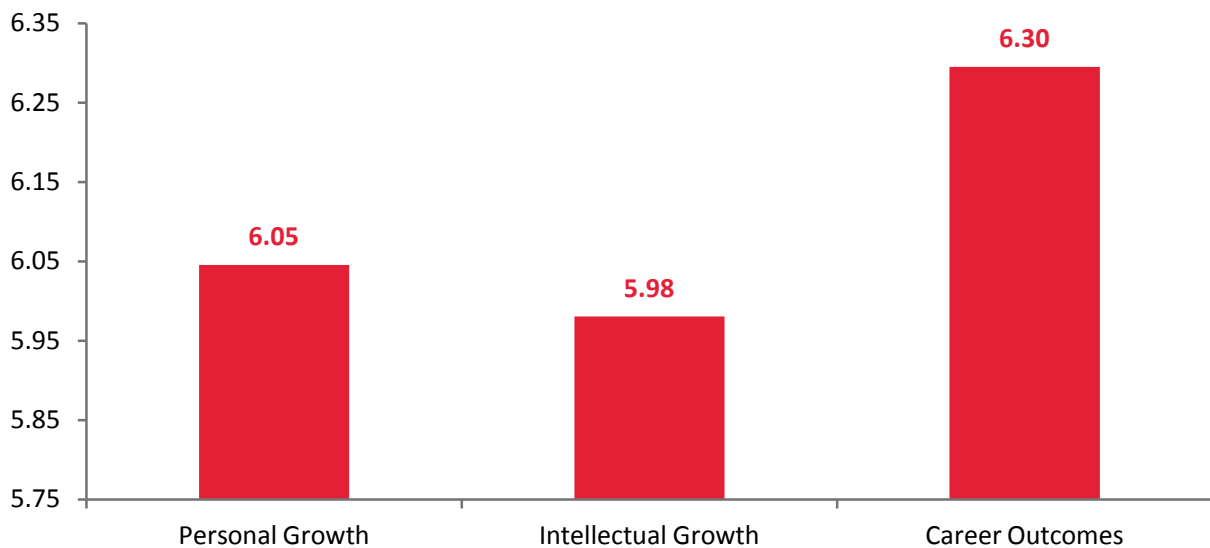
## SECTION 2 – WHAT PARENTS WANT: KEY FACTORS BEHIND COLLEGE CHOICE

There has been a significant shift this year in the key factors driving prospective students' college choice. While in 2012, career preparation rivaled academic strength as the primary driver for undergraduate programs, in 2013, career preparation tops all other factors and is the primary driver of college choice for prospective students. This is true for parents of prospective students, as well; among these parents, *Career Outcomes* tops *Personal* and *Intellectual Growth* as the most important factor. (For definitions of each factor, please refer to Appendix 1.)





**Figure 3. Importance<sup>1</sup> of Having Child Achieve Following Outcomes from College Education**



While the affordability of college has been questioned in the national media and in policy debates, our research shows that affordability is a second-tier driver behind the academic strength and career outcomes for parents. This reinforces the idea that communicating value is about more than just focusing on the cost of higher education, but also about communicating benefits, particularly career preparation, the academic environment, and ultimately, outcomes.

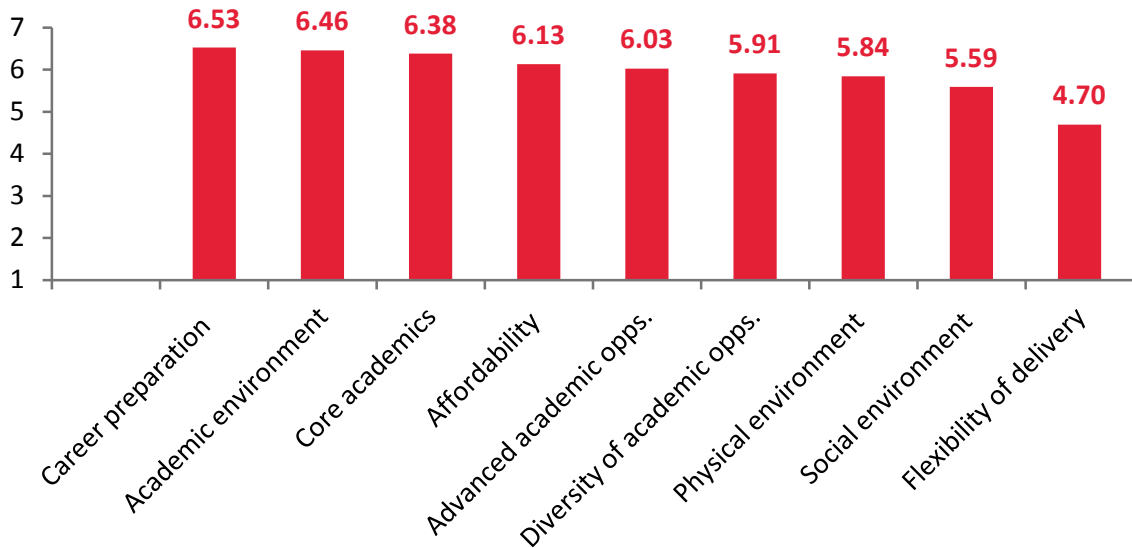
#### Communicating Value

*Ask your Client Services Advisor how Eduventures can help you develop a strong value proposition across audiences through our hands-on workshop.*

<sup>1</sup> Average, 1-7 scale, 1=Not At All Important; 7=Extremely Important



**Figure 4. Importance<sup>2</sup> of Top Enrollment Drivers of College Preference for Child**



Given that perceived value is more than just financial and is closely associated with career preparation, it is important to understand what outcomes parents are looking for when evaluating colleges and universities. Parents have a preference for what we define as characteristics that are the “Means to Success,” which are those overall skills that their children will employ to achieve success over the long-term, such as critical thinking and communication skills. In order to develop messages that resonate with parents, and to some extent, begin preparing students for the type of experience that will help them develop these skills, colleges and universities would do well to illustrate how the experiences they provide help develop students toward these goals. Rather than just focusing on placement rates and average starting salaries to communicate career preparation, schools will be well served to focus on specific outcomes.



It is notable that prospective students’ desired outcomes are not as closely aligned with employers’ expectations for how college will prepare the next generation of our workforce.<sup>3</sup> Parents have a different view than their child and mirror the expectations of employers more broadly. This is not very surprising, given that parents, with deeper professional experience, sometimes even as hiring managers, understand better the skills that employers are looking for. Even with that experience,


<sup>2</sup> Average, 1-7 scale, 1=Not At All Important; 7=Extremely Important

<sup>3</sup> See Eduventures’ 2013 College Bound Market Update Foundational Insight for details



however, there are some attributes such as “working in groups” that employers value much more strongly than either parents or prospective students do (see Appendix 2 for the top 10 skills employers seek). This leads to an opportunity for colleges and universities to be more explicit in showcasing the strengths of their programs and, to some extent, to educate parents and students about the importance of these experiences in leading toward future professional success.

**Table 1. Importance<sup>4</sup> and Rank<sup>5</sup> of Gaining Outcomes During College – Parents and Students**

	<u>Parents</u>		<u>Students</u>		
	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Importance</i>	<i>Rank</i>	
Be able to pursue a personally fulfilling career path	6.58	1	6.51	2	
Gain in-depth knowledge and expertise in their chosen major	6.43	2	6.54	1	
Learn to be a responsible adult (e.g., fulfill obligations, make sound judgments)	6.42	3	5.95	11	
Develop critical thinking skills that help them analyze and evaluate ideas	6.41	4	6.04	9	
Learn to be an independent adult	6.41	5	6.05	7	
Learn to communicate effectively in written and verbal form	6.30	6	5.82	14	
Have skills that will help them enter a specific career	6.29	7	6.39	3	
Be adaptable for future careers and career changes	6.26	8	6.05	8	
Be able to conduct themselves in a professional manner	6.25	9	5.91	12	
Learn to apply academic concepts to real world situations	6.24	10	6.01	10	
Have networks that will help them find a career	6.22	11	6.15	5	
Develop self-esteem and self-confidence	6.17	12	5.62	20	
Find a job within six months of graduation	6.13	13	6.15	6	
Have strong future earning potential	6.12	14	6.25	4	
Gain deeper understanding/knowledge of themselves	6.04	15	5.65	18	
Broaden their understanding of the world by being exposed to new ideas and people	6.00	16	5.88	13	
Learn to think across academic disciplines	5.94	17	5.62	19	
Develop the ability to understand and communicate with people from different backgrounds	5.90	18	5.61	21	
Gain knowledge that will help them in a global economy	5.90	19	5.70	17	
Learn to contribute to their community	5.87	20	5.52	23	

<sup>4</sup> Average, 1-7 scale, 1=Not At All Important; 7=Extremely Important

<sup>5</sup> Rank is list of outcomes in descending order of importance



Be able to attend a good graduate or professional school after graduation	5.82	21	5.80	15
Learn to lead groups	5.76	22	5.56	22
Develop lasting friendships with peers	5.69	23	5.74	16
Learn to work in groups	5.68	24	5.23	25
Learn to be a global citizen	5.53	25	5.31	24

Parents not only influence choice about college, but also are advisors to their children on future careers and the steps needed to achieve success. While parents prioritize outcomes differently, the type of parent involvement – *Observers*, *50/50 Partners* and *Directors* – has little impact on how these skills are ranked overall. *Directors* have a slightly stronger preference that their child will have a strong future earning potential over *Observers* and *50/50 Partners*, but otherwise, parents prioritize these outcomes similarly across their level of involvement. By educating parents early in the college search process about how their child can be the most successful, you are laying the groundwork for a partnership with parents to support students toward their goals. As we have noted earlier in this report, and with the companion *2013 College Bound Market Update*, career preparation is the number one driver in college choice for prospective students and parents. Developing strong, effective partnerships with parents can reinforce overall campus initiatives toward effective career preparation, resulting in better outcomes for the institution and a competitive advantage when targeting students.

## SECTION 3 - COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: HOW TO TALK TO MOM AND DAD

### WHAT YOU NEED TO TELL THEM?

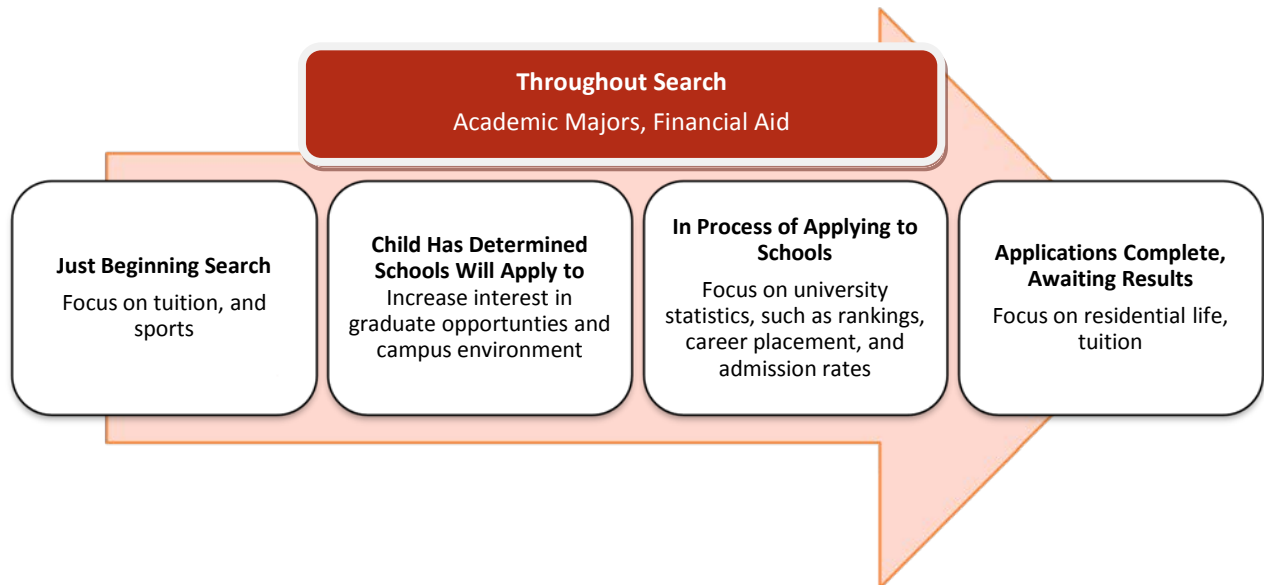
Marketing your institution should not focus solely on the prospective student, but rather, needs to include messages that will resonate with parents as well. The good news is that there are only minor differences in the type of information that *Directors*, *50/50 Partners* and *Observers* seek when evaluating programs. This means that messages that target parents will resonate regardless of the degree of parent involvement in the search process. What is important to know is that parents are evaluating schools based on information that is not solely focused on cost.

Mirroring the behavior of prospective students, parents also look for information regarding academic majors and financial aid across all phases of college search. Parents spend less time focused on the overall campus experience and student profiles than their child, often focused on quantitative, rather than qualitative, information. The exception to this is the parents who are *Directors*. As they lead the college search process, they are evaluating the holistic experience their child will be engaged in,



including social and extracurricular activities. Given their high degree of education as a group, it is likely that they evaluate schools based on their own experience and recognize how much social and extra-curricular activities can enhance a child's learning experience.

**Figure 5. Key Information by Search Phase**

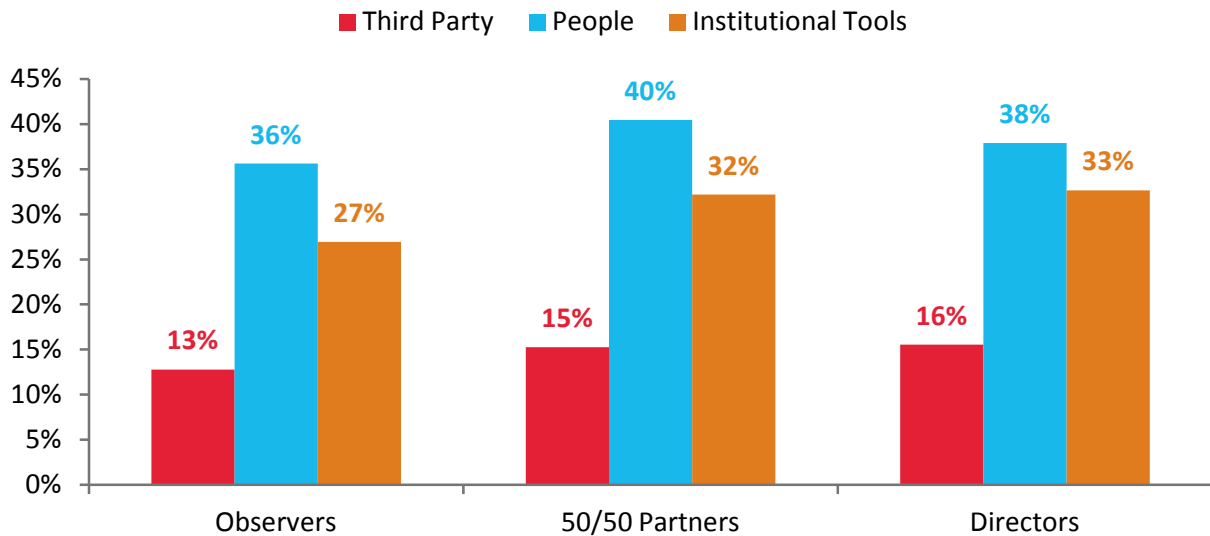


## HOW DO THEY GET THEIR INFORMATION?

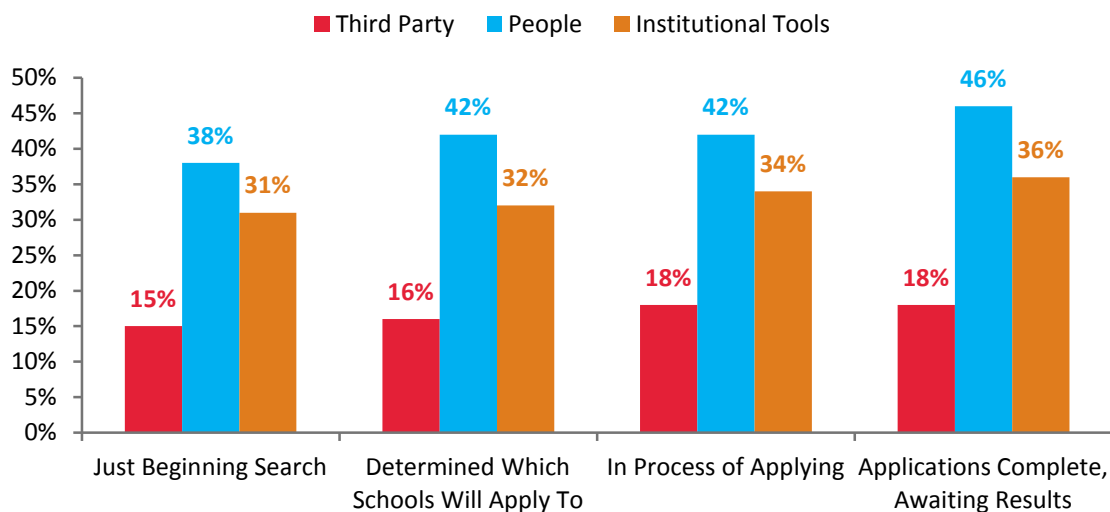
Parents seek information about colleges not only through the school's published information, but also by conferring with family, friends, and colleagues. It is clear that people and the institution's own tools far outweigh the usage of third party tools. Parents of prospective students frequently consult family, friends, and colleagues in their search, but parents also rely more heavily on high school guidance counselors and college admissions staff than their children do. Your admissions staff is likely prepared to answer the types of questions that parents ask, but you should also consider including the types of messages that resonate with parents when reaching out to high school guidance counselors. For example, parents more strongly value the experience college provides in the areas of developing critical thinking skills and helping their children become more independent adults than prospective students do. If you were just to look at the influence guidance counselors had on prospective students, you might be tempted to reduce the outreach to that population and focus your resources on other areas. Another mistake is to assume that guidance counselors are just a conduit to the prospective student and not communicating as directly with parents. Given that high school guidance counselors are often influencing the influencers (parents), it would be more advisable to adapt your messaging instead.



**Figure 6. Tools Used by Parent Type**

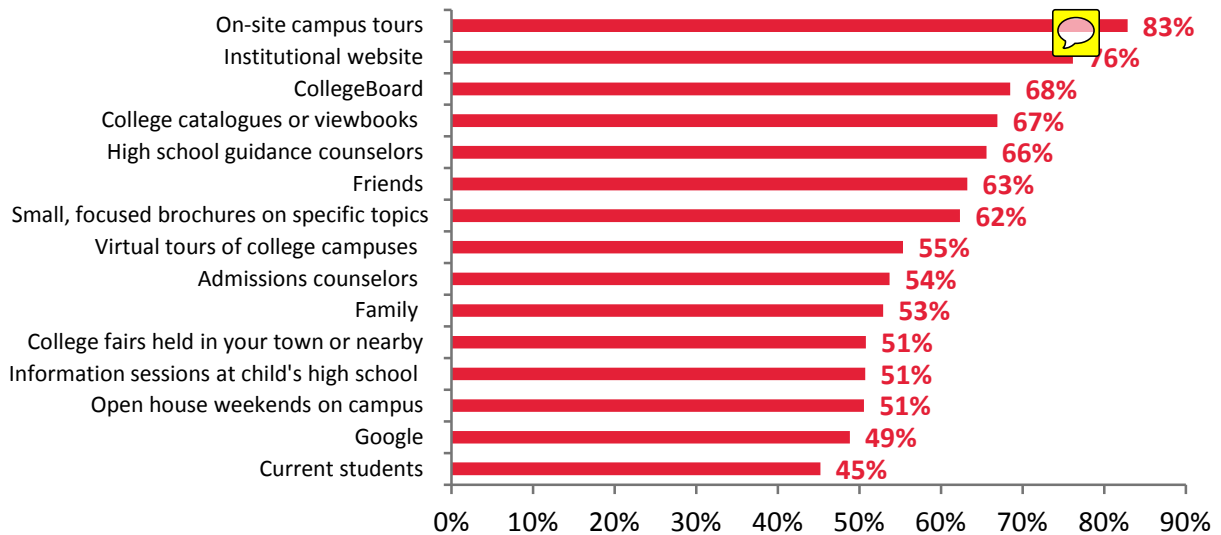


**Figure 7. Tools Used by Prospective Students Across Search Phase**

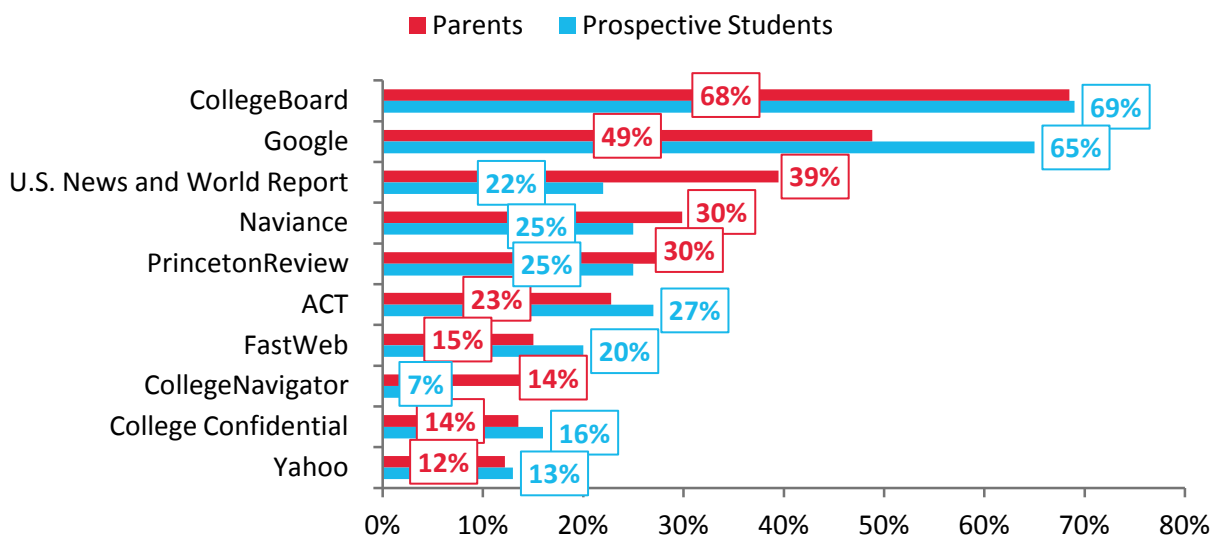




**Figure 8. Top 15 Sources of Information Used by Parents – All Types**

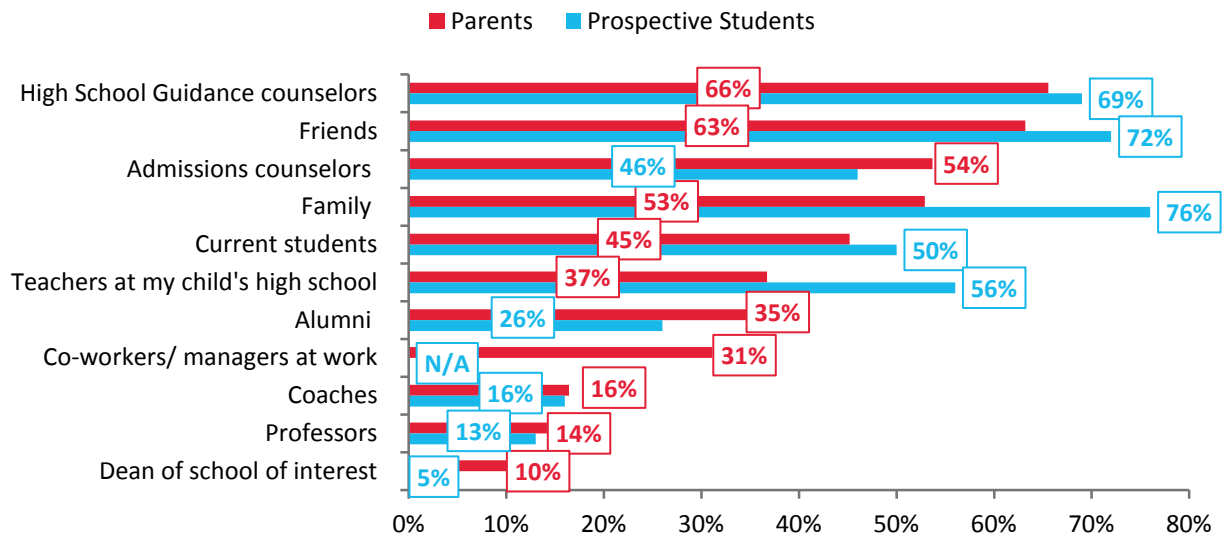


**Figure 9. Top 10 Online Sources of Information – Parents vs. Students**

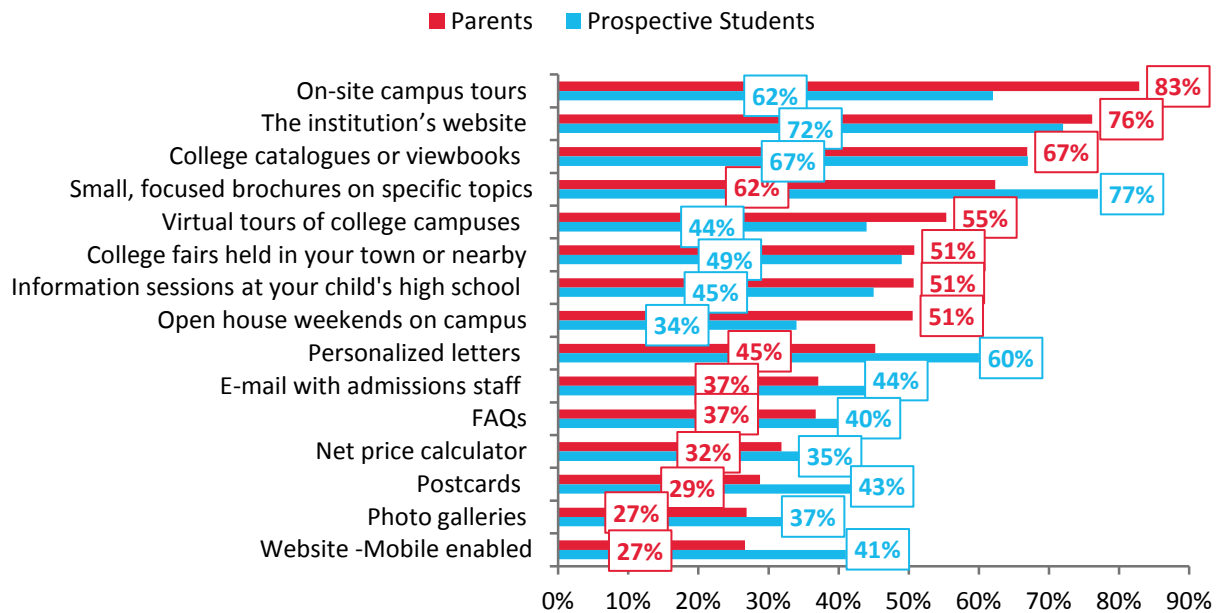




**Figure 10. Top Sources of Information (People) for Parents, Compared to Students**



**Figure 11. Top 15 Institutional Tools Used by Parents, Compared to Students**





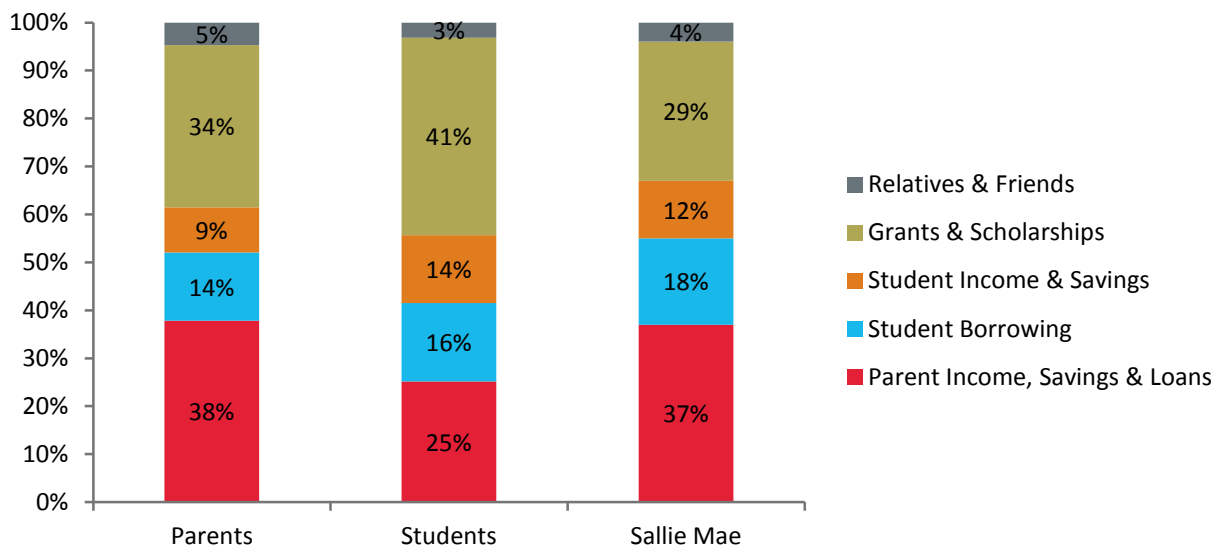


## SECTION 4 – PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF FINANCES AND COST

### WHAT ARE THEIR FINANCIAL EXPECTATIONS?

We were interested in exploring the apparent disconnect between affordability as a second-tier enrollment driver and the continuing national discourse on the cost of college and rising student debt. As part of the *Eduventures 2013 Market Updates*, we asked parents and prospective students how they expected to finance their college education. We compared these findings with a recent study by Sallie Mae and Ipsos<sup>6</sup> on how students and families are actually paying for college.

**Figure 12. Parent and Student Expectation for How They Will Pay for College Compared to How America Pays for College Results**



Based on this comparison, it is clear that students are overestimating the amount of grants and scholarships they will be offered as a percentage of their total college cost. Parents more accurately estimate their own contributions, but they are nevertheless underestimating the amount borrowed

<sup>6</sup> Source: How America Pays for College 2012: A national study by Sallie Mae and Ipsos



by their sons and daughters in filling this gap. Colleges must be acutely aware of the impact of increased student and family borrowing. As state and federal agencies pay greater attention to this topic, colleges and universities must not only improve the communication with students and families on the true cost of college, but also strengthen core outcomes and completion rates so that students are graduating with an ability to pay.

This gap in expectation and reality is going to increase pressure on families financially, with some questioning the return on investment that a college degree brings. With a slow global economic recovery, low job growth, and the erosion of wealth experienced by the middle class, schools will increasingly find themselves competing not only with other institutions, but also with the decision to delay or forgo college. Investments in delivering a high-value educational experience need to be coupled with efforts to educate parents and students about the benefits, costs, and outcomes that a degree brings.

Higher education institutions should not ignore the financial situation that parents and students must go through to attend college or desensitize parents to the cost by highlighting grants and scholarships that students may not ultimately get. Rather, colleges, and enrollment management units, specifically, should be explicit in the recruitment process about the cost of attending their institutions and the value of that investment (i.e., the return on investment). Enrollment management units should be up-front and clear that though in some cases, attending college can be expensive, their institution is worth the cost. This is a key point and must be balanced with a focus on the outcomes that are most important to parents and students.

## CONCLUSION

In this highly competitive environment, colleges and universities need to be continually refining their process for differentiating from competitors and making the case for investment in higher education. As colleges become more sophisticated in recruiting, they need to exploit every opportunity to reach and influence their market. Gaining mindshare of parents is a key way colleges can accomplish this goal. Even though parents have been part of the recruitment process for many years, most colleges and universities don't have a sophisticated approach to targeting parents, and therefore, are under-leveraging this potential partnership. This has only increased in importance, as parents have become increasingly more influential in the college search process. Therefore, it is critical to consider their preferences, goals, and perspective. In order to recruit the best possible class, not only do colleges and universities need to be targeted in speaking directly to students, but they also need a robust marketing campaign that reaches this most critical of influencers. This report, and the companion *2013 College Bound Market Update* Foundational Insight and Interactive Tool provides the foundation for developing an effective strategy.



## METHODOLOGY

The *2013 Parent Market Update* is a survey of nearly 1,300 parents of high school students and their perspective on the college search process.

Demographics of Parent		Total
Gender (Parent)	Female	72%
	Male	28%
Race/Ethnicity (Parent) (not mutually exclusive)	American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%
	Asian or Asian American	5%
	Black or African American	8%
	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0%
	Hispanic/ Latino	5%
	White	76%
	Other	1%
	Prefer not to answer	6%
Region (Parent)	Northeast	33%
	South	51%
	Midwest	7%
	West	9%
Relationship to Child	Biological parent	97%
	Foster parent or legal guardian	0%
	Step-parent	1%
	Grandparent	0%
	Other	2%
	Prefer not to answer	1%
Custodial Parent	No	3%
	Yes	96%
	Prefer not to answer	1%
Number of Dependents Currently Enrolled in College	0	66%
	1	28%
	2	5%
	3	1%
	4	0%
	Average	.43
Number of Children Expected to Attend College (inclusive of child in survey)	0	4%
	1	31%
	2	45%
	3	15%



	4	4%
	5	1%
	6	0%
	8	0%
	10	0%
	<i>Average</i>	1.89
Marital Status	Single, never married	3%
	Married	84%
	Divorced or separated	10%
	Widowed	1%
	Prefer not to answer	2%
Educational Attainment	Some high school	1%
	High school diploma or GED	5%
	Some college	12%
	College diploma	41%
	Graduate or professional degree	40%
	Prefer not to answer	1%
Annual Household Income	Less than \$40,000	7%
	\$41,000 to \$80,000	18%
	\$81,000 to \$120,000	24%
	\$121,000 to \$160,000	19%
	More than \$161,000	32%
International	U.S.	99%
	International	1%

Eight Eduventures' Enrollment Management client institutions provided email lists of parents of inquiries to be contacted. The participating institutions are:

- ▶ James Madison University
- ▶ Loyola University Maryland
- ▶ Merrimack College
- ▶ Ohio State University
- ▶ Purdue University
- ▶ University of Arizona
- ▶ University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- ▶ University of North Georgia

The web-based survey was conducted from December 2012 through January 2013.



## HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Eduventures recommends using this data in the following ways:

- ▶ Teach colleagues about the college bound market and the importance of their parents as influencers so that strategic decisions – whether in marketing and financial aid, department-level, or university-wide – are realistic, forward-thinking, and market-ready
- ▶ Develop messaging to resonate with parents during the recruiting process
- ▶ Inform outreach strategy to connect students and parents with your institution at the times – and through the channels – that are most effective
- ▶ Train admissions staff to speak to key student and parent concerns and expectations
- ▶ Educate deans and faculty on parent concerns and expectations regarding specific academic disciplines



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

#### Definition of Outcomes Factors

Personal Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Learn to be an independent adult</li><li>Develop lasting friendships with peers</li><li>Learn to be a responsible adult (e.g., fulfill obligations, make sound judgments)</li><li>Develop the ability to understand and communicate with people from different backgrounds</li><li>Learn to contribute to my community</li><li>Gain deeper understanding/knowledge of myself</li><li>Develop self-esteem and self-confidence</li><li>Be able to conduct myself in a professional manner</li><li>Learn to communicate effectively in written and verbal form</li><li>Learn to lead groups</li><li>Learn to work in groups</li></ul>
Intellectual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Be able to attend a good graduate or professional school after graduation</li><li>Broaden my understanding of the world by being exposed to new ideas and people</li><li>Learn to be a global citizen</li><li>Develop critical thinking skills that help me analyze and evaluate ideas</li><li>Learn to apply academic concepts to real world situations</li><li>Learn to think across academic disciplines</li><li>Gain knowledge that will help me in a global economy</li></ul>
Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Find a job within six months of graduation</li><li>Have strong future earning potential</li><li>Have skills that will help me enter a specific career</li><li>Be adaptable for future careers and career changes</li><li>Be able to pursue a personally fulfilling career path</li><li>Have networks that will help me find a career</li><li>Gain in-depth knowledge and expertise in my chosen major</li></ul>



## APPENDIX 2

2011 National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) report *Getting Noticed, Getting Hired*

### Top Skills Employers Seek

1	Ability to work in a team structure
2	Ability to verbally communicate with people in and out of the organization
3	Ability to make decisions and solve problems
4	Ability to obtain and process information
5	Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work
6	Ability to analyze quantitative data
7	Technical knowledge related to the job
8	Proficiency with computer software programs
9	Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10	Ability to sell or influence others



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Eduventures is the industry leader in research, data, consulting, and advisory services for the higher education community. For nearly 20 years, college and university leaders and education industry providers have looked to Eduventures for innovative and forward-looking ideas, for insights into best practices, and for help with making the strategic and operational decisions vital to their success.

More about Eduventures can be found at

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